

The State Flag

Series: North Carolina State Symbols



No matter where they fly, flags symbolize the pride of a people. Flags the world over command respect and inspire loyalty. Since the events of September 11, 2001, the American flag has become a more familiar sight around our nation. It has helped citizens find strength and comfort during a difficult time. Another emblem of patriotism is our state flag.

State flags in the United States generally consist of the state's coat of arms on a colored background. Early records show that North Carolina's first flag had just such a design. Legislation concerning the establishment of a state flag was not passed until 1861. It described a different design.

On May 20, 1861, a state convention met in Raleigh and passed a resolution calling for North Carolina to leave the Union. That same day Colonel John D. Whitford, a convention member from Craven County, introduced an ordinance proposing a state flag. The ordinance was referred to a committee, which consulted William Garl Browne, a Raleigh artist. Browne submitted a model that was different from what the ordinance requested, but the state convention approved the flag on June 22, 1861.

The 1861 flag has a red field on the left with a white star in the center, and two horizontal bars of equal width—the top is blue and the bottom is white—on the right. Above the star in a semicircle is the inscription “May 20th, 1775”—the date of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. Beneath the star in a semicircle is the inscription “May 20th, 1861”—the date of secession. This flag was employed for the first time during the Civil War. It remained in use until 1885, when the legislature adopted a new design. (An 1861 silk state-issue flag of the Eighth Regiment North Carolina State Troops is on view in the exhibit *North Carolina and the Civil War* at the Museum of History.)

The 1885 flag consists of a blue field on the left with a white star in the center, and two horizontal bars of equal width—the top is red and the bottom is white—on the right. The letter *N* in gilt is to the left of the star, and the letter *C* is to the right. The inscription “May 20th 1775” still appears above the star, but the inscription beneath the star reads “April 12th, 1775”—the date of the adoption of the Halifax Resolves.

No changes have been made to the North Carolina flag since 1885, but legislation passed in 1907 has increased the flag's visibility. That law requires the flag to be flown at all

state institutions, public buildings, and courthouses. Many schools and organizations also fly the flag. It seems only right that the emblem of the Old North State should fly proudly for all of its citizens to enjoy.